## Role of Political Parties in Pakistan and Perverted Form of Democracy

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## **Abstract**

In direct contravention to founding fathers' envision, Pakistan was ruled, by the military for much of its existence. Whenever civilian rule manage to come about has been compromised at best and distorted at the worst, at the behest of the men in Khaki. The Pakistani military is often held responsible for and accused of undermining institutional growth. Moreover political representatives when in power did not deliver on 'stability' and development front due to ideological and structural inadequacies, giving an excuse for military to intervene. Besides the power relations that Pakistan inherited – feudal dominance - continued unabated even after independence, establishing its iron hold onto state institutions including that of the military. In fact, social composition of feudal elites did not alter all these decades, pushing majority of people out of the corridors of power. Even presently unraveling social, economic and political upheavals, it seems not powerful enough to rupture and debase elites. Given these socio- political and economic realities prevalent in Pakistan as to what are the prospects of civilian rule in the country? This paper explores answers to that question in a context of renewed optimism that is sweeping the country at present - because a democratically elected government has completed its full five year term (2008-2013) - a rare political achievement; and argues that civil-military relations shall continue to radiate disappointment in view of ever growing role of security establishment on account of extremely volatile neighborhood and violent politics within.

**Keywords**: Political parties, Institutional development, Democracy, Dictatorship

As a rule, political parties are like pillars on which the edifice of nations rests. A political party is a polity or an illumination

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political system with an authority structure, pattern of power distribution, a representative process, electoral and decision making system. Societies are never homogeneous. There are people of divergent views and ideologies in every society and state if taken broadly. Actually the difference of opinion or preference makes political parties. The beauty of democracy lies in the disarray of people having different and varied views, ideas, ambitious and political aspirations. So much so that in every house a father may differ from his son ideologically.

"A political party, as such is polity or organized political system authority equipped containing power distribution loaded with representative process and paradigm of electoral and decision making mechanism. A political party is a connecting bridge between the public and the government emanating and taking its roots from the general masses. It helps people to have a forum to identify, express and articulate their interests." \[^1\]

In the context of the emerging scenario Pakistani people feel strongly about lawlessness, unemployment, religious extremism and the burning and blazing problem of terrorism. Then, foreign relations with the world around also require a forum to tackle such matters. Thus political parties are barometers to gauge the political temperature of states or nations. Political parties serve the functions of catalyst to put into action the lethargic governments and goad them into action, and as such of tools of change is another name of political parties.<sup>2</sup>

In almost all existing societies democratic, quasidemocratic, even in despotic governments and states try to dispense with political parties and throw their quilt on political parties like federal Castro in Cuba while Pervaiz Mushraf is a recent example of dictator in league with Pakistan Muslim League (Q) headed by Choudery Shujat Hussain, run party under the cover of Musharaf for almost 8 years. The party eroded when Musharaf went in self exile and suffered a shameful defeat in the General Elections 2013 because of its one time affiliation with a dictator. Similar was the case with General Muhammad Ayub Khan and General Zia ul Haq. Both of them used political parties as their stooges. Political parties are actually vital for those in power whether democratic are otherwise. To use a system's phrase political parties are a major in putting device, allowing citizens to get their needs and wishes heard by the governments in power. Without political parties individuals would stand ignored by the governments.

Consequently, people feel that they are real powers to be reckoned with and the real source of strength for political parties. But unlike other democratic countries like U.K, U.S.A and even India political parties in Pakistan do not have manifestos and ideologies to attract the masses. And that is one of the reasons that they are easily available to dictators to use them for prolonging their dictatorial designs and extending their political legitimacy. The outcome is the fading and meeting trust of people on political parties and decreasing trust on the leaders. A glaring and evident contradiction in political parties is deficiencies and hegemonic structures and practices even though the same party may seem to struggle for democracy in the country. That is the reason why people try not to be duped by such political parties and their promises and manifestos are considered a cry in the wilderness and a damp squib. Political instability occurred because Pakistan suffered from lack of competent leadership and well organized political parties.<sup>3</sup> This resulted in the growth of regional and parochial forces, political bargaining and flagrant travesty of democratic norms landing the country into the quagmire of confusion and uncertainty. The writ of Government wilted and reactionary forces gained momentum. The period of history we are passing through is a defining period for our integrity and survival.

The need of the hour is to shrink and stave off anti Pakistan forces and ward off impending apocalypse and lurking eerie of déjà vu to avoid these impacts, national cohesion is life saving needed, lest we fall into the abysmal trench of misery. We strongly need a revival of the vision and shibboleth of M. A. Jinnah, i.e., unity, faith and discipline to revamp our life. He had advised the political parties in Pakistan to ion hands and brings up a concise program, effect social justice and the rule of law by making a precedent and reforming themselves first. He warned against unfettered populism, of regional, religious, sectarian and communal variety being harbingers of utter disaster. He further emphasized faithful adherence to achieve national objectives and targets on economic, social, political, educational and related issues for blending various factors, rather merely tilting and showing proneness towards larger sections of population and their representative.

Undoubtedly, political parties can make it by motivating their supporters and followers to agree upon a minimum consensus above party politics. Mehmood asserts that Pakistan's political parties are barely and scantily democratic. Very few have held in house elections on a regular basis or have nominally performed the rituals. The country is affluent in family dominated and autocratic parties in which the genes and means take precedence over competence and the accident of birth provides a sure ladder for leadership. The feudal system negates the concept of democracy in the same way as military rule does. Consequently the political system that has taken root in Pakistan is the antithesis of democracy.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately Pakistan miserably lacked the efficiency, vision to come out of the quagmire of despondency caused by the incompetent leadership drenched in self interest. The national harmony could not be achieved consequently. The Pakistan founding party – Muslim league fascinating to be the pioneer party in the creation of Pakistan, never achieved the status of the national party and devastatingly failed to put the pieces together of the fragile and fragmented notion. The nation suffered actual democratic stability, constitutional framework and economic breakthrough. Juxtaposed put in brazen contrast to the Congress party in India which paved the way for national development and put India on the path of political ascendency.<sup>5</sup> The situation is the same with the rest of the political parties. Every party is divided and subdivided into small and mini groups. Political parties falling prev to provincial and district level, engaged only for grabbing power at any level possible. In the history of Pakistan, the first decade of its birth is marked by political instability in a non legal non constitutional sense, reflective of military and bureaucracy permeating the stratum of national polity. Gradually political power slipped from political parties into the hands of the army, civil service or the bureaucracy for that matter, never usurped power intentionally or of its own whimsical volition, rather it was circumstantially forced to step in. The reason being, the political immaturity, spelt and chasm between people and the leader, creating a gulf, for the uninvited force to fill the vacuum. Then we had the bad luck of having dishonest politicians imbued with ulterior motives dominating national interests. The Muslim league did nothing worth mentioning to solve the confusion and mediate or arbitrate between the government and the people, the committed duty of the political party to create harmony. The greed for power led the Muslim league party to corrode and crumble and creating the efficacy of military in the social and political fabric of our country history bears a witness to the fact that the consolidation of Pakistan has always been at the logger head with political doldrums and turbulence. Consequently our country is lagging behind in the run for prosperity, political stability and national

consensus. The provinces are meaning of deprivation and the domination of Punjab, being the biggest province; create a sense of exploitation of the smaller provinces like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Sindh; and peripheral federating units like Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan and FATA. Pakistan, therefore, has never been able to integrate its provinces and distribute resources equitably between the predominant province of Punjab and the rest of the provinces the NFC award by the previous Pakistan Peoples Party led government has however amicably resolved the issue. A national reconciliation commission on the pattern of the NFC is required to streamline the existing anomalies between the various factors. Besides, the political injustice prevailing and those who are the victims of such faulty systems need to be addressed. The political party that was a big political and social force and worked for the creation of a separate homeland was capsized within a few years to the feeble and frail stuff. Now coming to the rest of political parties – each one has a unique political identity, ideological orientation irrespective of the degree to which it has faded. The country can be proud, rightly, of the multicultural character of Pakistani society. However these parties have not been able to meet the public expectations. Political analyst and students of political studies contend that feudal culture. family and caste based political systems are the causes of our political instability leading to confrontation and failure of democracy in the country. Democratic culture has not taken root in our country because of intermittent military intervention causing decay of institutions and political processes developing and evolving a party system with a petty degree of internal democracy could not repair the damage caused by military innervations. Unfortunately the period of military intervention or the period of civilian rule in the country under the main political parties have not been quite different in attitude, behavior and approach from the military rulers. Both exhibited personalized rule of hybridism, party leaders acted and ruled like military dictators taking decisions whimsically. Democracy means self rule and self government. Democracy and political parties are linked together like flesh and blood and there is no concept of useful democracy without organized political parties the two are symbiotic. Political parties are like a land on which the sapling of democracy is planted and nurtured and masses are the gardens to water the young sapling into a powerful tree to take root. Firmly only, but when people fail to take due care of the tree of democracy it welts and degenerates persistently and consistently. Hence nourishment is

must. The sense of democracy needs to prevail among the people. This is what had not happened in Pakistan during its infancy, especially during the 1<sup>st</sup> decade of its birth (1947-1956). When public affinity to civilian government is strong military intervention becomes weak and vice versa.<sup>7</sup>

Instead of strengthening democracy, the Pakistani political leadership is more interested in amassing and grabbing revenue generating schemes and projects squeezing the hard earned money of the poor taxpayers. During the course of study, while put questions to students, professionals and academician, they responded in the following manner. 'They have no interest in democracy or the country at large'. 'Politicians are the same all over. They promise to build a bridge where there is no river' 'our Politicians are the strange creature, when they see light at the end of tunnel, leave the same to buy another tunnel':

"our politicians are giving safe passage to NATO, US containers engaged in war with Taliban in Afghanistan from Karachi to Afghanistan'. 'Our politicians are not interested at all in the integrity and solidarity of our country'. 'They safe guard their interest by inviting foreign intervention'. 'Our politicians are myopic in their approach and are also not able to see beyond their vested interests."

Politicians are supposed to give vision and lead the country but Pakistan has an anomaly. Unlike leaders of political parties elsewhere, Pakistani political parties' rules are for in dynastic style. They consider themselves accountable to none. With the exception of one or two, rest of the parties are not democratic and dictatorship reigns supreme within the party. Now let us have a look at the major political parties of Pakistan. PPP is perhaps the largest party in Pakistan having roots in masses. The founder was Z.A Bhutto, a dynamic personality, with a vision, who ruled the country until his shameful mistrial and judicial murder. Despite his ability, he could not tolerate criticism within the party and country. The party, after his death, fell in to the hands of his wife, Nusrat Bhutto and down the line to his daughter, Benazir Bhutto till her assassination in Dec, 2007. The party, now, is being run by Benazir's, husband, Asif Ali Zardari and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari with emergence of new challenges with each passing day. The 2<sup>nd</sup> largest party is Pakistan Muslim league (N) headed by Muhammad Nawaz Sharif since decades like a family enterprise. The Awami National Party (ANP) a nationalist party, now headed by Asfandyar Wali Khan, after the death of his father Abdul Wali

Khan. It seems that ANP would be led by Aimal Wali, after the death of his father, thus with fourth generation as party leader. Another political party is Mutahhida Qaumi Movement, headed by Altaf Hussein setting in London and steering the party via remote control. Then on religious side, there is Jamiat Ulam Islam (JUI-F), headed by Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman, succeeding his father to the party leadership. In the inter-party election, Jama'at Islami has a good track record. So far none of family member has succeeded Amir. Then there are parties like Pakistan Tehrik Insaf (PTI) the new emerging party with a vision of new Pakistan headed by an ex-cricketer Imran Khan, who seems bent on changing Pakistan, socio-politically and most of his followers are youth, fully committed to transform Country in to Naya-Pakistan or new Pakistan. They have secured considerable seats in national Assembly and play the role of opposition in National Assembly. The PTI was also able to form the coalition government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and are claiming to make it an ideal province. With the exception of PTI and Jamat-i-Islami, all other smaller parties have the dynastic character, one way or the other. Pakistan cannot make transition to democracy without competitive party system. Political parties are indispensable to censure popular sovereignty in to representative Governance. It is also a fact that whatever political or ideological leanings and propensity, these parties may have, their existence is vital to stave off military or civil intervention.

Furthermore, all major parties like PPP & PML (N) PTI, ANP, JUI & Jamat-i-Islam need to renounce the vendettas that characterized their rivalry leading to military adventurism. If and when democracy is allowed to take root, they must understand the importance of respecting demo-crating norms, whether in government or in opposition. The Charter of Democracy (CoD) signed by Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto is a classic document to act upon. However, much will depend on the parties own willingness to implement the CoD and internal reforms. While strong roots base has enabled them to remain viable, their ability to expend this base and further integrate it into the party apparatus, a goal that has so far eluded them. The General Election 2013 had laid firm foundation for strengthening democracy in the country but the government lacks clear vision and strong governance. It is now a great trial for the a party in power, i.e. PML (N) and the opposition composed of various parties to see to it that the journey of democracy keeps going and is never derailed. Though not much substantial but still Judiciary has tried to put an end to the law of necessity and the doors of direct martial laws and military adventurism are closed, to be opened with much use of force and violence only.

Feudalism is yet another bane for political stability, sound and viable democratic culture, in Pakistan. Jones asserts that as they visualize and contemplate the failure of democracy in their country, Pakistanis are apt to blame major landowners. The feudal as they are known, are routinely denounced as ostentatious, egocentric, reactionary hypocrites, unscrupulous who constitute a huge hurdle and an obstacle to social agonist and democratic development. Malik contends that having been given land power by British, the feudal have managed to hang on to both ever since by using a combination of cunning tactics and brute force. As new generation of aristocrats; <sup>10</sup> Malik goes on to say with degrees from privileged western universities have seen to it that their monopoly of national politics and economy remain unflinched instead of political support to regime whether military or quasi democratic feudalists exact favor through ministerial positions, loans and property allocations. 11 Malik maintains that in the period of both the military and civilian rule the feudal have been the power behind the throne.<sup>12</sup>

Jones in his book says that the four addresses have other passages in common. 13

"Ayub Khan pledged: 'our ultimate aim is to restore democracy. His successor Yahya insisted; 'I have no ambition other than the creation of conditions conducive to the establishment of a constitutional government'. Ironically, the least democratically minded of the lot, Zia ul Haq gave the clearest assurance of all; 'My sole aim is to organize free and fair elections which would be held in October this year.'" <sup>14</sup>

Pervaiz Musharaf had claimed that the armed forces have no intention to stay in charge any longer than is absolutely necessary to pave the way for true democracy to flourish in Pakistan. A few days later the 1999 coup, Musharaf spokesman, Brigadier Rashid Qureshi, insisted that while Musharaf agreed,

"All I can say', he assured a television interviewer in January 2000, 'is that I am not going to perpetuate myself' but brazenly he remained in power for eight years in utter violations of his assurances." <sup>15</sup>

Political parties with low political culture, did not have root in the masses, political leadership on the other hand did not have faith in democratic institutions.

"Weak civilian leadership or representation on the part of parliament pulled the military into the politics of Pakistan. Weak social structure along with poor economic conditions led to military intervention." <sup>16</sup>

Political parties or the factions of influential personnel rendered their support to a regime, quasi democratic or whether military to exact favors through ministerial positions, loans and property allocations. This state of affair was the consequence of either weak party structure or the absence of the extension of national parties' program to all parts of the country which had to provide the consensus-based political culture. In the early phase of Pakistan's politics, Keith Callard observed:

"The system of political parties in Pakistan bears little resemblance to that of most other democratic countries. Politics has begun at the top...Politics is made up of a large number of leading persons who, with their political dependents, form loose agreements to achieve power and to maintain it." <sup>17</sup>

It was the shifting alliances of the political parties to form the governments of their own choices in the provinces without giving any serious attention to the issues of constitutional importance i.e. status of the Urdu and regional languages, nature of the electorate, settlement of the refugees and the status of Islam. In Bengal after the provincial elections 1954 the United Front got the explicit majority, resultantly formed the government which was alternately changed within the front coalitional partners due to the changing allegiance of the front constituent parties with each other. The United Front was the coalition of Awami League, Nizam-i-Islam, Krishak Sramik Party, Ganatantri Dal, the Congress, the Scheduled Caste Federation and the United Progressive Party. After Fazlul Haq dismissal from the East Bengal ministry, new entrant was Abu Hussain Sarkar who ran the ministry with the support of all the constituent parties of the Front except Awami League. Major disagreements on both local and national issues cause four of the minor parties to announce their withdrawal from the coalition and it was later formed by the Awami League under the Attaur Rehman. Keith Callard generally remarked over this situation that "a coalition such as this could have no conceivable common policy, but it was in a position to maintain a government". 18 Politicians in Pakistan have been never been angles either. They have mostly acted as co conspirators of the military, either for the fear of victimizations or just to enjoy their turn in power. The judiciary fares no better. It legitimized all the military coups and its consequent attempts at perpetuation of political power. Despite the military attempt for civilian politicians, all coups in Pakistan have had initial backing from a section of political forces. The political forces of Pakistan become a source of strength for any incoming military rule, whose domestic legitimacy is derived from this readily available political support. Even today, all political parties are playing on the military regime's wicket, accepting all its ground rules and pursuing the path of power separately. They have demonstrated their proclivity for partisan politicking rather than an ability to unite for their common interest.

The occurrence of these incidents and events can only be explained by reviewing the circumstances under which the country was created. When an electoral political regime is in power, it will seek to prolong its control and satisfy key members by awarding them critical positions in important institutions. Furthermore, many internal problems in political parties lead to problems in the political system, such as an undemocratic structure and a lack of political values and practices. These problems decrease the popularity of political parties and reduce the trust of the leaders among the people.

Hasan Askari Rizvi thoroughly analyzed the political structure of the newly created Pakistan and concluded that less organized and less integrated political parties led to the development of the military regime. Most of the political dealings were regional, factional and prejudiced, which was against the political standards of any political system, sabotaging the political culture of the Pakistan. These less-developed and less-established political parties failed to compete with the Punjab-based civil bureaucracy as well as the military bureaucracy and their political leaders instead of competing with the civil and military bureaucracies, and they became flunkies in the hands of these bureaucracies. Rizvi's work explained the lack of integration and organization among the political parties.

## Conclusion

The study found out that political parties are largely a factor of division in the Pakistani politics than that of unity which is the ideal. This has resulted into imbalanced regional development in addition to gross dissatisfaction among the populace. The study also found out that political parties are organized in a manner that reflects family politics leaving the rest of the Pakistani people with no chance to vie for and democratically win an election.

Democratic principles like mass participation and rule of law are rare attributes of the Pakistani politics and the constitution of the sovereign state of Pakistan is changed at will by the "conniving" party membership. Political parties therefore lack majority support which breeds further dissatisfaction among the populace.

However, I must commend the role of some opposition political parties for the struggle to restore hope among the Pakistani people. This paper focuses on the role of political parties for the last two decades in Pakistan and for this I relied on Randall and Svasand's<sup>19</sup> a series of potential functions to answer my research questions. These authors discussed these issues as a series of functions. These functions are oriented towards the electorate (representation, integration), linkage-related (recruitment, and training of political leaders), and government-related (making government accountable, organizing opposition). The four functions by Randall and Svasand helped me to understand the parties roles in the democratic system, especially in Pakistan. The summary of every function regarding the political system of Pakistan is discussed. In the case of Pakistan, people elect their representatives but these elected representatives do not represent their voters in the assemblies. The politicians have not risen to the challenge of building a national movement but rather stick to the provincial approach in politics. The fact is that in every election cycles only about 50% of the qualified electorates participate. Many electorates feel unrepresented in the national politics and therefore refuse to participate. As Rounaq Jahan argues in her book, Pakistan: Failure in National Integration, from the very start, political leaders have failed to develop a national political institution. The civil society is partitioned into different groups representing religion, ethnic, languages etc, with a dire absence of a national ideology.<sup>20</sup>

In other words for democracy to function well in Pakistan the politicians need to look beyond narrow interests of religion, ethnic or social affinities. Politicians need to reach across the ethnic and religion aisles. Also the electorates need to be educated on their rights and responsibilities. However part of the democratic dysfunction in Pakistan is also attributable to lack of citizens awareness. Either by design or by accident the politicians have seen to it that the masses remain uneducated about democracy. So in effect the politicians, even the parties in the opposition, are the people responsible for lack of genuine democracy in the country. The political parties are run as family enterprises. The parties are built around personalities and not around any coherent ideas and

ideologies. For example the PPP seems to be essentially a Bhutto's family party. The leaders of the party are always coming from the same family. Even the PML (N) has been led by the same people since its formation. In this kind of situation diversity of opinion is marginalized and the status quo is upheld even when it is not working. This state of affair could only be redressed if the people are well-informed and educated in the running of true democracy. It is important that the political parties recruit and train members in a better organizational framework, especially at the local level. Politicians at the local level need to be given more roles in the parties and in the running of the society. Building a political party around individual persons or family does not augur well for the thriving of democracy. A situation where everything has to be suspended simply because the political leaders are not around is detrimental to the smooth functioning of the society. Accountability of any government makes it more stable and functional.

According to social contract theory, governments must be held accountable for their actions. If the government is unable to satisfy the people then it could be replaced at election time. In the past, to become more powerful, any government threatened and pressurized the opposition to suppress them. 45 During 1988 to 1997, there was a hide-and-seek policy between the government and the opposition that weakened the political structure of Pakistan and resulted in military intervention. If the government is made accountable by the influence of the political parties, then the elected representatives present in the government will avoid any type of corruption.

Today, both electronic and print media play an important role in keeping the government accountable. As the media keep a close eye on the deeds and misdeeds of the government and due to the freedom of expression, the media present the misdeeds of the government via the Internet, television, newspapers, or radio for the people to watch and see. Opposition parties exist to challenge governmental policies if they are against the desires of people. The opposition party has very important role in the political development of any country. However the role of opposition should be critical but constructive. In Pakistan the opposition has remained only critical. Instead of helping the government to make beneficial policies, the opposition only criticizes the government. Currently, there is another form of opposition to the government: electronic and print media, as the media have a close eye on the conduct of both the government and the opposition. The political

development in the Pakistan may never be free completely of the problems. However, further studies and works can minimize these problems in the political system of Pakistan. But for this, the politicians and the leaders will have to work hard together as a nation, from the grassroots level up to the national party leaders. To solve the problems present in the political system of Pakistan, a prolonged study should be undertaken to identify the problem of lack of integration and of how the entire nation could be integrated into one of political unit.

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